



News Release



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Contacts: Roy Stearns, State Parks, (916) 654-7538
Sara Feldman, Foundation, (213) 748-7458

Los Angeles State Historic Park

New State Park on “Cornfield” Site Opens Today

Park-Poor Neighborhoods Getting First New State Park

Location is One of the Most Important Historic Sites in Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES – California State Parks’ Director Ruth Coleman announced today that the first park to take shape on the old “Cornfield” site, now named Los Angeles State Historic Park, is officially open as of today.

“This transformation has taken a Brownfield and made it a beautiful Greenfield that many feel is now “the front lawn” of this great city,” said Coleman. This is a major milestone because dozens of organizations and hundreds of people from the surrounding park-poor neighborhoods fought long and hard to preserve one of the last remaining open space parcels in downtown Los Angeles.”

Often called “the front lawn” of downtown Los Angeles, the new interim park is now providing the surrounding neighborhoods with what they have sought for years, a destination for recreation, community events and relaxation that ties their community, families and friends together.

“I am very proud to celebrate the opening of one of the City’s newest and most welcomed additions, Los Angeles State Historic Park,” said Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. “This park’s very existence is a true testament to the strength and commitment of the surrounding communities who fought hard to bring this park here. This park is beautiful and will definitely serve as a local landmark,” Mayor Villaraigosa added.

Included in the 18 acres of the Interim Park are a number of features designed to bring maximum public use of the temporary facilities. The cost is just over \$2 million, with funding coming from Proposition 40, the Park Bond Act of 2002. The site now includes:

- Natural Amphitheater for community events.
- Multi-use plaza for community productions.
- Approximately four acres of open turf area for informal recreation and events
- Temporary classroom structures for community meetings and events
- Over 200 trees
- Lighting structure that highlights historic railroad buildings.
- A viewing mound with telescope for views of LA skyline
- Interpretation panels and footprint layouts for historic and archeological features
- Over one mile hiking, walking, biking trail around park.
- Native landscaping around the interim area.

One of the Most History-Filled Sites in Los Angeles

But while people will be enjoying the traditional park amenities, there is another side to this park that give it special significance. It is one of the most important historical sites in all of Los Angeles. This site quite literally tells the story of the earliest beginning of human habitation in Los Angeles, and that is the story State Parks intends to tell in the permanent park. It includes the following:

- The site has been a location of human occupation by Native Americans for thousands of years, the Tongva, Hokan-speaking and Shoshonean peoples from the Great Basin, including the Gabrielinos, having occupied the greater Los Angeles area for thousands of years.
- The Native American village of Yang-Na is believed to be near the river end of the site, near the site where the Portola expedition forded the L.A. River for the first time and set up a base camp on a bluff above the Cornfield.
- The Spaniards, who first explored and established Los Angeles and who camped on the bluff near this location, described the beauty of the site in their journal.
- It is the place, or near the place, where the Portola expedition founded the state's largest city in 1781.
- It is the site of the Zanje Madre (mother canal) that was built to provide an irrigation lifeline for the agricultural fields that surrounded the earliest Pueblo settlement. Sections of this important historic canal remain to this day.
- Chinese Immigrants began to arrive in the 1850s, working to build the railroad and taking up residence on the Cornfield site.
- The site was the location of historic railroad operations as a passenger depot and later as a freight depot in the late 1800s. Some of the foundations for the old

structures remain, buried on the site, outlined by the new lighting structure in the interim park.

- The transcontinental railroad once ended here, leading many to refer to this site as the “Ellis Island” of Los Angeles.
- In the 1930s, the Chinese were forcibly removed from Old Chinatown, on the park site, to the present location of Chinatown, to make room for Union Station. Many remember this migration to this day.
- In the late 1990s, when this site was slated to become an industrial development, the surrounding communities rose up and began a battle for the last remaining parcel of open space in their neighborhoods. Organized under the moniker of Chinatown Yards Alliance, they successfully challenged the proposal, today’s park being the outcome of their lengthy battle.

California State Parks acquired the property in December 2001, using \$30 million from the Proposition 12 Parks Bond Act of 2000, co-authored by then-Assembly Speaker Antonio Villaraigosa (D-Los Angeles) and Assemblymember Fred Keeley (D-Boulder Creek) and signed into law by then Governor Gray Davis.

The Interim Public Use Park, opening today, resulted from the extensive public input process that included California State Parks, the Cornfield Advisory Committee established through State legislation by State Senator Richard Polanco (now retired), and hundreds of members of the surrounding neighborhoods. The Advisory Committee, composed of a diverse cross-section of community groups and individuals, met regularly for nearly two years, providing information and guidance on the planning and design incorporated into the Interim Public Use Plan and the General Plan that will guide the design of the permanent park.

Designers Working on “World-Class” Permanent Park

While the Interim Park is opening today, the effort for completing a permanent park is well underway. In the Design Team Competition process that is now underway, the three Designers chosen to compete for the honor of designing the permanent park, will use the General Plan and the themes presented by the community as the basis for brainstorming their ideas.

On Saturday, October 14, 2006, State Parks and the California State Parks Foundation will be conducting the second public Charette/public workshop in which the Design Finalists will unveil their design concept entries to the community. The community will provide input on what they like and the Design Selection Committee will make an advisory recommendation to State Parks’ Director Ruth Coleman. This meeting will be held starting at 9:30 a.m. at the Southern California Goodwill Auditorium, 342 N. San Fernando Road, Los Angeles, CA 90031.

A brief statement regarding the vision of each of the three design firms is listed below:

Field Operations

475 Tenth Avenue, 10th floor

New York, New York 10018

Contact: Richard Kennedy, Field Operations -- 212-433-1450, ex. 223

The members of the Field Operations team say they have a “deep personal interest in this project” and believe that “the new Los Angeles State Historic Park has transformative potential for the urban community by providing a contemporary environment that engenders creativity, innovation and curiosity.” Their main goals are to “help the city realize a unified park that dramatically improves urban livability, redefines adjacent neighborhoods, inspires both learning and physical experience and increases sustainability.”

Hargreaves Associates

398 Kansas Street

San Francisco, CA 94103

Contact: Mary Margaret Jones, Hargreaves Associates -- 415-865-1811

Eager to tackle the issues, the Hargreaves team sees an opportunity to create a design that is a “reclamation of post industrial land for public occupation, reconnection of a community to a forgotten area, creation of inviting places for people, working with natural resources amidst urban development, and fostering real economic development opportunities.” Los Angeles State Historic Park will be “a new model of urban park for State Parks, a focal point for the city of LA, and a destination place for residents, tourists and businesses.”

Mia Lehrer + Associates

3780 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 1100

Los Angeles, CA 90010

Contact: Esther Margulies, Mia Lehrer + Associates -- 213-384-3844

The Lehrer team vision of the park is of a “living museum. Their view is that the Park will illuminate the rich history of the city, heal an injured piece of land and provide a strong connection between the Los Angeles River and downtown.” It will be a “park that teaches us about our city, nature and culture in new ways, a park that provides connections to neighborhoods and open space systems, a park that will provide opportunities for improved public health.” Lehrer says “Los Angeles State Historic Park can be a contemporary version of Ellis Island for the west coast, introducing visitors from around the world to Los Angeles and to the vast diversity and richness of the California State Parks System.”

The Cornfield site is located between North Broadway and North Spring Street, near the Los Angeles River and El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument.

The interim park was created following the highly successful “Not a Cornfield” art project by the Annenberg Foundation, which generated the first visitors, many thousands of people, who enjoyed watching the first transformation of this property. The Annenberg Foundation has provided a grant of \$200,000 toward the Design Competition process. The California State Parks Foundation, the private, non-profit advocacy group for the State park system, is conducting the Design Competition in partnership with California State Parks.

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